

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #2580/01 3212100
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 172100Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6510
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 5588
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 1898
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 5348
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 2059
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 3033
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE USD FAS WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF EDUCATION WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RUEANAT/NASA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 002580

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR STAS DR. GEORGE ATKINSON; WHA/BSC; AND ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [TSPL](#) [SCUL](#) [OEXC](#) [OSCI](#)
SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S S&T ADVISER VISITS ARGENTINA

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 02537
[1](#)B. BUENOS AIRES 00707
[1](#)C. BUENOS AIRES 01888

[1](#)1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified, and not for Internet distribution.

Summary

[1](#)2. (SBU) Science and Technology Adviser (STAS) to the Secretary Dr. George Atkinson led a delegation of U.S.

SIPDIS
scientists and engineers on a visit to Argentina November 7-9. The delegation's aim was to conduct an informal and limited survey of Argentina's level of S&T attainment with an eye to determining Argentina's capabilities and priorities in S&T research and education, and potential as a participant in STAS' vision for a new collaborative relationship between universities, E.g. "Global Science Partnerships for the 21st. Century (GSP21)." Dr. Atkinson left impressed with Argentina's capabilities in many fields and the GOA enthusiasm for the GSP21 concept. His visit garnered goodwill with the GOA and Argentine S&T community and positive media coverage. He and post believe Argentina could be a solid GSP21 partner.

[1](#)3. (U) The following individuals comprised Dr. Atkinson's delegation: Mr. Andrew Reynolds, Deputy S&T Adviser to the Secretary of State; Dr. Kim Boyer, WHA Jefferson Science

SIPDIS
Fellow; Dr. Lee Schwartz, the State Department Geographer; Dr. Ed Samulski, former Jefferson Science Fellow, University of North Carolina; Dr. Christina McCain, AAAS Fellow; Mr. Cung Vu, Technology Warning Division, Department of Defense; and Mr. Nathan Singh, University of Pennsylvania.

Why Argentina?

[1](#)4. (U) Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary (STAS)

Dr. George Atkinson led a delegation of U.S. scientists on a visit to Argentina November 7-9. Argentina was the third stop on a four-country trip (the others were Peru, Chile, and Brazil) undertaken before and after the fifth in a series of STAS' Global Dialogues on Science and Technology, in this case on the topic of Bioinformatics hosted by Brazil on November 12-15. The delegation's aim was to conduct an informal and limited survey of Argentina's level of S&T attainment, in order to better appreciate Argentine S&T priorities in the future and related commitment to education and basic and applied research. The visit also afforded an opportunity to discuss STAS' concept of a potential "Global Science Partnerships for the 21st. Century (GSP21)," to foster more extensive exchanges of students and possibly faculty between US and Argentine universities.

¶5. (U) To that end, Atkinson and delegation members met with GOA Minister of Education, Science and Technology Daniel Filmus; Secretary of Science and Technology Tulio Del Bono; MFA Undersecretary for Foreign Policy Ambassador Luis Cappagli, the foreign ministry's third-ranking official; and with numerous other officials and practicing scientists in both the public and private sectors.

The State of Argentine S&T

¶6. (SBU) The Argentine state research organization (CONICET) provided Dr. Atkinson and the STAS delegation a series of presentations designed to give the visitors a broad view of the type of research now being conducted in Argentina. The presentations highlighted the work of Argentine scientists and engineers in such fields as nanotechnology and laser development, and facilitated a good deal of scientist-to-scientist interaction. The Embassy arranged the CONICET meetings because CONICET exercises some manner of control over virtually all Argentine scientific research. The organization boasts over 4,500 fulltime researchers, 5,000 doctoral or post-doctoral fellows, and pays a portion of the salaries of all university-based researchers. CONICET is also directly responsible for much of the available public funding for scientific research.

¶7. (SBU) The delegation also met with representatives of high-tech and engineering firm INVAP (Reftel B). INVAP is a leader in Argentine nuclear research and power production and space exploration. The firm recently completed construction of a research reactor in Australia and is continuing work on the USD 270 million Aquarius/SAC-D satellite (a joint Argentine space agency (CONAE)-NASA project). Director of the MFA's Bureau for International Security and Nuclear and Space Affairs Elsa Kelly sat in on the meeting. In a wide-ranging discussion regarding Argentina's relative world position in nuclear power and space exploration, Kelly and INVAP President Dr. Hector Otheguy praised the Kirchner administration for its dedication to high-tech projects. Kelly said the late 1980s and 1990s, &were a nightmare for research and development and many of our brightest people lost interest.8

¶8. (SBU) Otheguy expressed strong interest in becoming a NASA sub-contractor, though he recognized the significant legal and regulatory obstacles. He told the delegation that INVAP's priority in both nuclear and space technology is the development of international partnerships which demonstrate the reliability and economy of Argentine high-technology. He said INVAP sees itself as both a competitor and potential sub-contractor to US nuclear and space firms.

¶9. (SBU) In response to a question from Atkinson on Argentina's intentions regarding the development of space launch capabilities (currently Argentine space-craft are launched from the U.S.), both Kelly and Otheguy were careful to say that Argentina is &fully committed to non-proliferation.8 On several occasions Kelly stated that any decision to develop space launch technology &would be made on a business model.8 She noted that there is a desire

to develop such technology only insofar as a sound profit argument could be made. Returning to nuclear power production, Otheguy stated that INVAP will help Argentina achieve its goal of 20% nuclear electrical power production, by bringing a third plant online by 2010 and a fourth by 2018 (Reftel C).

A Frank Exchange

¶10. (SBU) CONAE Executive and Technical Director Conrado Varotto used a meeting with Dr. Atkinson to passionately express his concern over the ITAR processes and its potential implications on further CONAE-NASA cooperation. Returning again and again to the subject, Barotto said, "This is not the way to have a partnership,"⁸ asking Atkinson in his role as STAS to, "use your imagination and come up with something new."⁸ After Dr. Atkinson asked him to be patient as the ITAR regime is in the process of being improved and streamlined, Varotto immediately jumped to the USG's recent abstention in the Inter American Development Bank on a vote to extend Argentina a loan to expand Argentina's remote Earth sensing capabilities.

GOA Wants to Move on the GSP21 Program

¶11. (SBU) The visit's defining moments occurred at a lunch hosted by Ambassador Wayne, at which Minister of Education, Science and Technology Daniel Filmus indicated he would support Argentina's participation in a GSP21 initiative, if one is forthcoming. Filmus' affirmation came on the heels of a pledge by the GOA's Science and Technology Secretary, Tulio Del Bono, to financially support GSP21 if Argentina could be a partner nation. Both men stressed Argentina's commitment to producing more scientists and engineers to make up for what they described as "disastrous" Argentine research and education policies of the past few decades. The GOA has already moved to improve incentives to study science, Filmus said, explaining that money has been budgeted to fund 500 new CONICET research positions. Del Bono said the GOA plans to eventually double the number of such positions, assuring Dr. Atkinson that any Argentine scientists who would study in the U.S. under a GSP21 program would have jobs to come home to. Del Bono guessed that Argentina would send between 100-200 students per year to the U.S. under GSP21, a significant percentage of the total of the approximately 500 PhDs in science Argentines earn each year.

¶12. (SBU) In other meetings, several heads of research institutions pursuing subjects ranging from coastal marine ecology to astrophysics expressed a desire to see the USG use a program like GSP21 to provide a simplified route to studying in the U.S. Numerous researchers noted that the complexity of the U.S. process often means their colleagues choose to go to Europe. Martn Ramrez of the Museum of Natural Sciences noted that the British, French, and Germans all had a single office (in Buenos Aires) where prospective students and researchers could apply to schools, complete required testing (language, requisite subject exams, etc.), resolve financial support matters, and receive qualified instruction on visas and immigration law. He commented that the difficulty of U.S. immigration law forced many researchers to look for opportunities outside the U.S.

¶13. (SBU) Some officials registered their concerns over the possible ramifications of such a program, however, especially its potential to accelerate brain drain. For example, CONICET Deputy Director Jorge Tezon noted that Argentines who study science and engineering in the US do not often return home to continue their work. He also stated that in his experience, "doctoral candidates who go abroad for more than three years almost never come home."⁸ On the other hand, Dr. Atkinson also enjoyed a session with a number of Argentine Fulbright Scholars with scientific academic specialties who had returned to live and work in Argentina.

Good Press

¶14. (U) Journalists from five national newspapers, one broadcast television network, a radio station, and a weekly magazine covered a press conference organized by the Embassy's Public Affairs Section on November 8. Dr. Atkinson related his impressions of Argentina and the GOA officials and scientists and engineers with whom he had met, while the journalists focused their questions on possible areas of S&T cooperation between the U.S. and Argentina. The resulting placements were positive, and included pieces in national dailies La Nacion, Clarin, and La Prensa, as well as a story in the largest provincial newspaper in the country, the Cordoba-based La Voz del Interior. In addition, Sunday newspaper Perfil interviewed Dr. Samulski as part of a story on nanotechnology. The GSP21 concept was not discussed with the press.

Comment

¶15. (SBU) Dr. Atkinson was impressed by the Argentina's capabilities in many areas of science and engineering and by the enthusiasm GOA officials displayed for the GSP21 concept. He remarked that Argentina could be an excellent partner, particularly as the GOA is already taking concrete steps to improve prospects for employing Argentine scientists and engineers in the future. RefTel A detailed the Embassy's recommendation for timely consideration of Argentine possible participation in a program like GSP21. The U.S. has long enjoyed excellent science and technology cooperation with Argentina, and it seems prudent to do what we can to ensure a similarly positive future. Further discussion with Argentina on a GSP21 initiative would go a long way toward that goal.

¶16. Deputy STAS Reynolds cleared on this cable.
WAYNE